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RHMFIISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000896

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LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KPKO SUR ER

SUBJECT: CDA HITS WALL WITH GSE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR

REF: ASMARA 874

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On November 19, CDA met at her request with Yemane Ghebremeskel, Director of the Presidency for the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE). CDA expressed her hope that with the November 28 arrival of the new Ambassador, the Embassy could reopen dialogue with the GSE across a range of bilateral and regional issues. She noted her concerns about the large defensive military build-ups on the Eritrean-Ethiopia border and asked Ghebremeskel's view of UN efforts to re-energize a political process to achieve both physical demarcation of the border and normalization of relations with Ethiopia.

¶2. (C) Ghebremeskel abruptly dismissed CDA's openings for discussion, flatly stating he would not share any information on the border with the Embassy. He added that he had just read John Bolton's book, commenting "Now we know the truth. The GSE knows U.S. policy and the U.S. will not do anything that is unpopular with Ethiopia. The problem is with Washington, they won't change their mind. We have done whatever we can) but policy is skewed. There is no point in our repeating ourselves." Ghebremeskel stated that senior State department officials and others in Washington have confirmed to the Eritreans that the border is not a priority issue for the U.S. Twice during the conversation, Ghebremeskel made references to U.S. assassination plots. When asked to explain what he meant, Ghebremeskel only replied that Eritrea had good information from Washington sources and if CDA was not aware of these USG discussions, she was "out of the loop." He described U.S. policy as hostile and unconstructive, saying that the GSE does not expect anything to change, "not in the next six months, the next year or even in three years."

¶3. (C) Changing the subject, CDA noted that as the GSE and U.S. hold the same professed objective in helping Somalia establish a strong, inclusive and viable government, we should be able to discuss an integration of GSE efforts with those of the international community - similar to our engagement on the Darfur peace process. Ghebremeskel evaded the subject of Somalia completely. He also refused to discuss the presence of Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys in Eritrea, commenting that he had "no idea if he is in Eritrea. If he is, it is of no concern." He explained that the Asmara

conference had been a Somali meeting and they could invite who they wished. CDA noted Eritrea's obligations under Resolution UN 1267 to refuse transit or safehaven to UN-listed terrorist groups or individuals. Again refusing to address the issue directly, Ghebremeskel curtly responded, "as far as our international obligations, we try to stick to them."

¶4. (C) Comment: This meeting was the Embassy's first formal conversation with Ghebremeskel since last February when the former Ambassador met with him concerning GSE interference with the Embassy's diplomatic pouches. Although he had agreed to this meeting, Ghebremeskel was clearly agitated even before CDA and notetaker arrived, as he was pacing the room, and he spent most of the meeting fussing with his hands and tapping his foot. Although always a difficult interlocutor, Ghebremeskel's deliberately insulting tone was more extreme than in any conversation over the past eighteen months, and the meeting stands in marked contrast to Post's recent and relatively open conversation with PFDJ Political Chief Yemane Ghebreab (reftel). Whether this exchange presages future difficulties for the new Ambassador in dealing with the President's office - or merely reflects Ghebremeskel's irritation at feeling compelled to meet with CDA during a clearly tense time for the GSE - is unknown at this point. However, given his position as President Isaias' Chief of Staff and the official nature of the meeting, we can surmise that Ghebremeskel's remarks generally reflect the views of the president himself. End Comment.

MCINTYRE